

Innovative play gives a good ride

by Sheena Jarvis

Road, a gripping and innovative character study, was presented by the Graduate Program in Theatre last week. The play's themes were supported by a wonderfully written script, believable dialogue, realistic settings and excellent acting.

Right from the beginning, in which the tramp Scullery (played by Michael Harms) escorts the audience from the lobby onto the set, you are made to feel you are a part of the unfolding drama.

The set is broken up into two rooms: one contains a stage and rows of chairs. The main set is divided into several smaller sets that represent the houses of the characters. The open concept is engaging, complimented by good lighting and timing.

The audience follows Scullery around as he shows them his neighbourhood. The interaction between audience and cast — who acknowledge the audience, and, when appropriate, address them directly — works very well.

Reality-based, the play examines the daily struggles of each of the characters with alcohol, hopelessness, loneliness and poverty without being preachy or moralizing. Although *Road*

THEATRE

Road
 directed by David Rotenberg
 Atkinson Theatre
 Wednesday, March 18

takes place in a British neighbourhood, the universality of the themes and the characters transforms the setting of the play into anyplace (one reason it isn't called *The Road*); the feelings that overwhelm the characters might be felt by anyone at any time.

The actors are all remarkable in their ability to portray up to three very diverse characters and to transport the audience into their world.

While this is not a comedy, some of the moments are very funny. Sanders Whiting is very expressive and humorous in the roles of the drunken Professor and the hapless father trapped in empty memories of his glorified adolescence.

Erik Ryle has one of the longest and most difficult scenes in the play. As Joey, a disillusioned young man who has lost his job, he runs the gamut of emotions from laughter and hope to pain, hopelessness and death. Ryle's performance is so strong that

his climactic scene, which would have been heavily melodramatic in the hands of a lesser actor, proves cathartic.

Scullery, the "host," is well-done, an omniscient character with the ability to smoothly lead the audience in and out of each situation. His character is not as well developed as it could be. Harms is charismatic in the role, but the thinness of the part leaves one wanting to know more, to see more of him.

Road presents the darker side of a less-than-prosperous part of Britain and deals with realities of life that aren't always pretty. One can almost smell the decay, booze, sweat, and rot of real life. While the ending may not be totally optimistic, the connection made between four of the characters as they open up to each other offers some hope. *Road* is engaging and thought-provoking.

(If you missed seeing *Road*, don't despair! The Graduate Program in Theatre is presenting Bertolt Brecht's *Three Penny Opera*, running April 2nd to April 8th in the Studio Theatre, Centre for Fine Arts. The company will consist of the same director, cast and crew. Considering the quality of *Road*, I will be the first in line to buy a ticket!)



Jerry Schaefer as Ernest Borgnine and Maira Dunphy as Shelley Winters in Big City Improv's *The Poseidon Adventure*. Big City turns the film's unintentional goofiness to its advantage. The production depends on brilliant performances and an inventive use of props for its humour — and something Big City refers to as...Poseidonvision. • photo by Warren Wilson

Parody of Poseidon Adventure sails on improv

by Carolyn Martin

When I went to see Big City Improv, I assumed I'd be reviewing their parody of the 1972 disaster film *The Poseidon Adventure* from the safety of my seat. Was I wrong!

The dual role of "Celebrity Purser" and "Celebrity Floating Corpse" had been left vacant by the scheduled celebrity, and somehow the role fell to me. Thus, I learned my first lesson about Big City: expect the unexpected.

You should expect, also, to laugh at the unexpected.

With their newest production, Big City bursts open the comedy that's been struggling to break out of *The Poseidon Adventure* for 20 years. The film followed a handful of survivors who attempted to escape from a capsized ocean liner. Gene Hackman (who was never again to reach such heights of melodrama) played a priest who led the group, which included Shelley Winters and Ernest Borgnine.

Big City turns all the film's unintentional goofiness to its advantage, just as it has done with its long-running *Star Trek* spoof *The Khan Saga*. Big City performer Gary Pearson says

THEATRE

The Poseidon Adventure
 Big City Improv
 8 pm Fridays, midnight Saturday

they've gone from creating comedy based on "bad acting on a ship" to creating comedy based on... "bad acting on a ship."

The production depends chiefly on the brilliant performances of its cast and an inventive use of props. Watch for a great establishing shot of the ocean liner — I never realized just how huge it was!

"Poseidonvision" viewers supplied to the audience turn everything upside down, making all those "Poseidonvision moments" a success. Things you may not remember from the film, including a severed head carried by one of the survivors and an "in case of emergency, break glass" case containing weinies, prove to be lifesavers.

The search for the ship's engine room leads to a series of humorous events, including the survivors emerging from a suitcase, Hackman

returning from the engine room with evidence of his find ("Gene Hackman went to the engine room and all I got was this lousy t-shirt!") and Shelley Winters swimming.

You have to see the way they pulled that one off.

Characters who were overblown in the film are hilariously bloated on the stage. Maira Dunphy is especially good as Winters. Warren Wilson is both sweet and funny as the lonely Red Buttons. Jerry Schaefer is a particularly obnoxious Borgnine; he also plays a pretty good wave.

The Poseidon Adventure may not have the widespread appeal of *The Khan Saga*, but it offers the Big City performers a real opportunity to demonstrate their tremendous improv talents as they play out a different conclusion (based on an audience suggestion pulled out of a hat) each performance.

As for me, I suppose I should have listened to David Healey/Hackman's words of wisdom: "So, you go to York and you expect people to follow you. You know how psychotic that sounds?"

A watery death soon followed.



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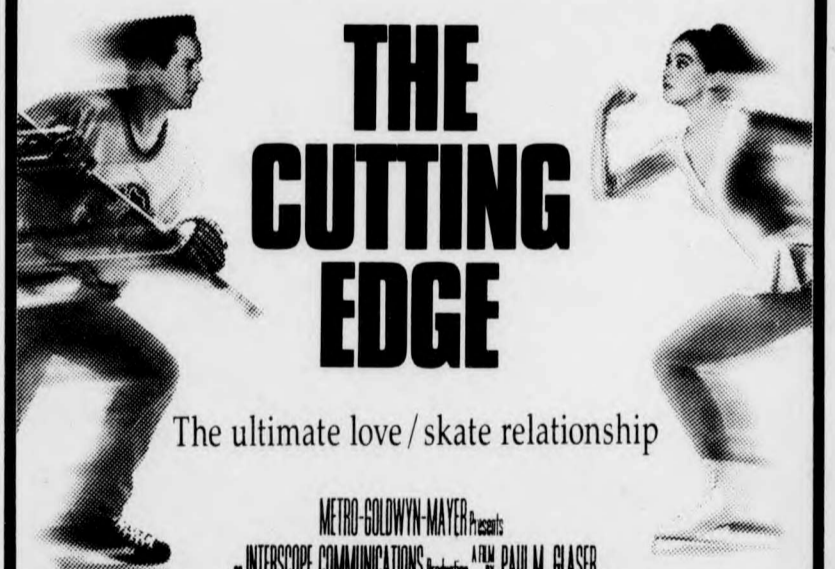
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